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Documenting the Kodak samples collection at the National Science and Media Museum in Bradford

Daugaard, Noemi

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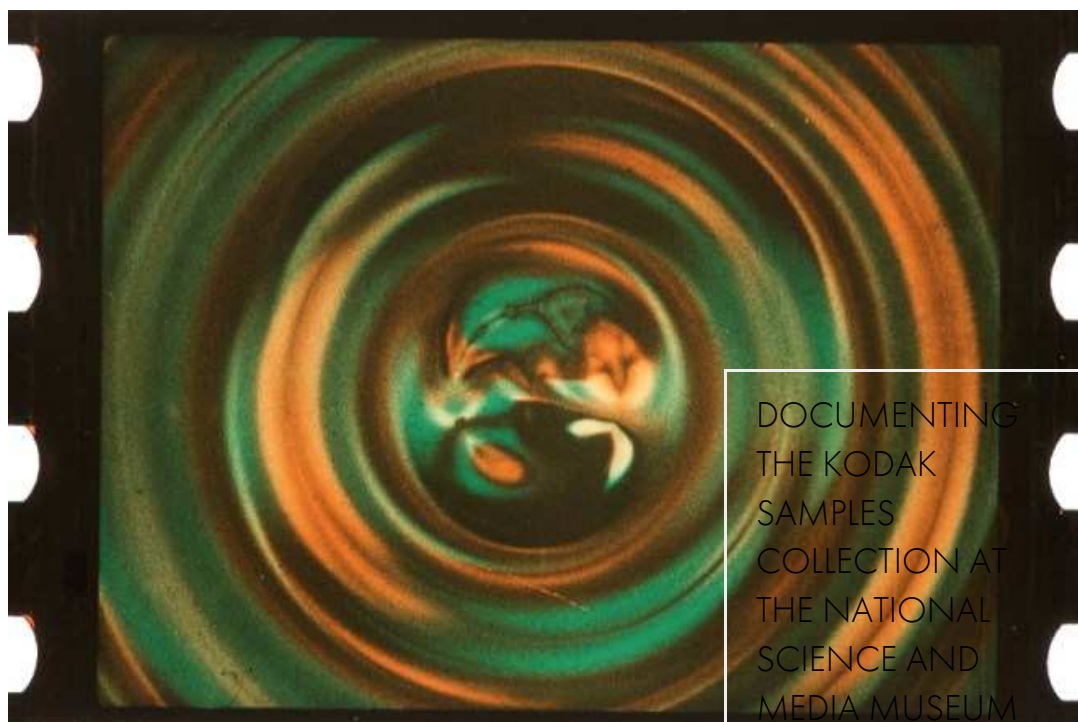
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FILMCOLORS – AN
INTERDISCIPLINARY
APPROACH
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DOCUMENTING
THE KODAK
SAMPLES
COLLECTION AT
THE NATIONAL
SCIENCE AND
MEDIA MUSEUM
IN BRADFORD

By Noemi Dugaard (<http://www.film.uzh.ch/de/team/drittmittel/daugaard.html>), PhD student, Swiss National Science Foundation Project *Film Colors. Technologies, Cultures, Institutions*, Department of Film Studies, University of Zurich.

In June and December 2017, two teams from the research projects ERC Advanced Grant *FilmColors – Bridging the Gap Between Technology and Aesthetics* (<http://www.research-projects.uzh.ch/p21207.htm>) and SNSF *Film Colors. Technologies, Cultures, Institutions* (<http://www.research-projects.uzh.ch/p21276.htm>) each made their way to Bradford, England, to visit the National Science and Media Museum (<https://www.scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk/>) and document a remarkable collection of materials. The first team consisted of principal investigator Prof. Barbara Flueckiger (<http://www.film.uzh.ch/de/team/people/flueckiger.html>) and me; the second team included Josephine Diecke (<http://www.film.uzh.ch/de/team/drittmittel/diecke.html>) (SNSF *Film Colors*), Joëlle Kost (<http://www.film.uzh.ch/de/team/drittmittel/kost.html>) (ERC Advanced Grant *FilmColors*) and Dr. Giorgio Trumpy (<http://www.film.uzh.ch/de/team/postdocs/trumpy.html>) (ERC Advanced Grant *FilmColors*). When Barbara Flueckiger and I first arrived in Bradford, the wonderful team surrounding Associate Curator of Film Toni Booth had prepared everything flawlessly, so that we could immediately proceed with installing our camera set-up and documenting the collection.

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The Collection

The Kodak Samples Collection is an invaluable resource on the history of color film technology from the late nineteenth century until the 1980s. The collection consists of approximately 1,530 color film samples, varying between one and seven frames in length, which have been cut (some of them quite roughly) from film reels. Generally speaking, the condition of the samples is very good, except for a mixture of glue and dirt covering some of them, probably deriving from the frames being pasted to a sort of collector's or photo album. The good condition of the prints, i.e. the lack of scratches, tears or similar signs of heavy usage, suggests that the samples were never or only rarely projected.

Apart from later Eastmancolor materials (which turned magenta over time), and a couple of black and white safety copies, the contents of the Kodak Collection represent a wonderful archive of color film technologies from applied hand coloring (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1212/>), tinting (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1216/>) and stencil (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1218/>) coloring to mimetic color processes such as two-color Kodachrome (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1230/>), Dufaycolor (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1257/>), Gasparcolor (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1264/>), and so on.



John Pledge and the Collection's Origins

The origins of the Kodak Samples Collection can be traced back to Harrow, England. In 1891, Eastman Kodak opened their first manufacturing plant outside of the United States in Harrow, a borough of London (see Kodak *timeline* here (<https://www.kodak.com/CH/de/corp/aboutus/heritage/milestones/default.htm>)). The plant kept running until 2016, when it was shut down after 125 years, as one of the last Kodak plants worldwide (see Joshi 2016).

In 1927, Kodak opened a museum next to the manufacturing plant in Harrow: the Kodak Museum, focusing on the history of photography, curated by John Pledge, also known as J.H. Pledge (Fifield 1980: 44). George Ashton describes Pledge as "a distinguished research worker who began his career with Dr. C.E.K. Mees at Wratten and Wainwright in Croydon, England." (1984: 102). The collection was devoted to showcasing all kinds of material related to photography and film and not limited to Kodak products.

As most of the samples in the Bradford collection appear to have been projected very little, it could be argued that the first samples must have been included at the time of the museum's first opening in order to

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accompany the cameras and other objects in the collection. In fact, the 1947 museum catalogue contains a section on color cinematography and mentions exhibits mounted on transparencies and illustrating various early color film processes (*The Kodak Museum*, pp. 62 ff.). However, the extremely broad documentation of color film processes, including those produced by competitors, seems to indicate the holdings might have been more than a simple illustration of technology. Indeed, my initial hypothesis was that the collection might have also served as a tool for keeping an eye on the competition. Unfortunately, further information about the Kodak Museum in Harrow and the curatorial work of John Pledge is scarce.

Apparently, according to James Layton (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/james-layton-54796a1b/>), now Manager of the Film Preservation Center at The Museum of Modern Art (<https://www.moma.org/research-and-learning/film-preservation/>), a similar collection can be found at the Moving Image Department of the George Eastman Museum (<https://eastman.org/moving-image/>) in Rochester, New York. This could be further evidence of the fact that the collection was started by Kodak in order to document color film technology and that, furthermore, it might have been used as a research tool.

From Harrow to Bradford

What is certain is that, starting in 1969, the museum was under the care of Brian Coe, who joined Kodak in 1952. Coe is no stranger, of course. As the author of *The Birth of Photography* (1976), *Colour Photography* (1978), *Cameras: From Daguerrotypes to Instant Pictures* (1978), and *The History of Movie Photography* (1981), he is an eminent authority on the history of photography. While I cannot prove whether John Pledge actively collected the samples that are now in Bradford, it is certain that Brian Coe worked with them and likely also expanded the collection with samples for the last decades of analogue film. As a matter of fact, a majority of the illustrations in Coe's seminal book *The History of Movie Photography* (1981) depict the samples in the Kodak Collection. As Michael Pritchard (2011) notes, Brian Coe significantly contributed both to the collection in Harrow, for instance by saving original materials the production departments were disposing of, and to the creation of a network of people interested in the history of photography.

The collection remained in Harrow until 1984, when it was donated to the newly opened National Museum of Photography, Film and Television in Bradford, Yorkshire, which later became the National Media Museum and, finally, the National Science and Media Museum. Brian Coe, however, did not move with the collection and, from 1985 onwards, Roger Taylor (https://www.linkedin.com/in/roger-taylor-1186aa23/?locale=de_DE) took on the role of Senior Curator of Photography.

Roger Taylor, an emeritus professor from De Montfort University in Leicester (<http://www.dmu.ac.uk/>), agreed to share his memories of the collection with me. The first thing he observed in our correspondence was that most materials arrived in Bradford without any sort of documentation or information. Furthermore, he was astonished by the broad spectrum of materials. In his email of 6 February 2018, he writes that the collection contained everything "from equipment to consumables, paper samples, packaging, handbooks, instruction leaflets, and not just from Kodak, but from other leading manufacturers." And among all these materials, the color samples collection was also to be found.

Understandably, Prof. Taylor also wondered about the reasons for collecting such an extensive documentation, not only of materials from one's own company but also from other companies. On the one hand, he assumes that the museum in Harrow was part of Kodak's 'educational purpose', especially as one of the earliest museums collecting photographic technology. Nonetheless, Roger Taylor agrees with me in one crucial point, namely that this could not possibly have been the only reason Kodak had to collect this incredible range of materials. He writes: "I doubt whether Kodak would have given the museum the sustained support it did without it serving another, unwritten, function; an invaluable resource to the research and administrative staff of the company itself." He continues: "When I arrived in 1985 I got the impression there had been a very strong link between the work of the Research Laboratories and the Kodak Museum whose reference set of colour samples created a base line of operational processes that were readily available for research and analysis." Thus, Roger Taylor's hypothesis seems to align with my own in suggesting that the Kodak Museum in Harrow and its collections, especially the Kodak Color Samples Collection, were part of larger projects, such as the mutual observation between competitors in the fields of photography and cinematography. Another example for this is the extensive Charles Urban collection, also at Bradford, which contains materials on various competing color film producers, which Urban seems to have collected for almost two decades. Urban, similarly to Kodak, also saved film samples of competing color film technologies, some of which Barbara and I also photographed for the Timeline. Keeping track of the competition was, then as now, crucial for any business.

Identification and Documentation of Color Film Processes – The Timeline of Historical Film Colors

While most of the samples in the Kodak Collection at Bradford can be attributed to their specific color film process and the staff of the NSMM have done an incredible job at cataloguing all the samples, a couple of mysteries persist. For instance, a number of samples, especially from the Charles Urban Cinematography Collection, remain unidentified and can be accessed in the new entry 'Unidentified Processes'

(<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/18928/>) on the Timeline of Historical Film Colors

(<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors>). Soon, the Timeline will offer users the possibility to independently tag individual pictures, so every user can contribute to the identification of color film processes, films, or even actors. More information to follow soon.

In any case, the collection in Bradford represents a unique asset for the *Timeline of Historical Film Colors*, as it has allowed us to expand the range of processes depicted on the Timeline and to gather fundamental new information on the history of early color film technology. Furthermore, the Timeline now contains examples of very rare early color film technology, for which, until our visit in Bradford, we had lacked pictures, such as the British processes Biocolour (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1338/>), Polychromide (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1234/>) and Zoeochrome (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1341/>). Moreover, the collection contains some lovely surprises, such as two hand-colored samples from Georges Demeny's *La biche au bois* (1896) (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/galleries/la-biche-au-bois-1896/>), to name only one example.

Lastly, as mentioned above, Giorgio Trumpy, research scientist in the ERC Advanced Grant research project *FilmColors*, joined the second research team in order to perform spectral measurements on several samples in the collection. The results of Giorgio's measurements serve a vital purpose in the framework of the ERC research project and will gradually be integrated into the *Timeline of Historical Film Colors* for everyone to access.

Acknowledgement

In closing, I would like to thank the staff at the National Science and Media Museum, especially Geoff Belknap, Curator of Photography and Photographic Technology, and above all Toni Booth, Associate Curator of Film, for being incredibly welcoming and a great help to our cause. Furthermore, thank you to Nicolas LeGuern, author of an invaluable study on the European Kodak research laboratories, and Michael Pritchard, Director-General of The Royal Photographic Society, who have both provided valuable input and materials on the history of the Kodak Samples Collection. Lastly, I am very grateful to Prof. Roger Taylor, for being incredibly kind and sharing his knowledge and assessment of the Kodak Samples Collection.

One last thing: I strongly encourage everyone to go to the *Timeline of Historical Film Colors* and have a look at our documentation of the collection here (http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/filter/?_sft_ubercategory=national-science-and-media-museum&sf_paged=1).

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*Michael Pritchard* (<http://britishphotohistory.ning.com/>)August 27, 2018 at 6:22 pm (<https://filmcolors.org/2018/03/15/bradford/#comment-1115>)

Hello! There is a further group of film samples from Brian Coe's personal collection. Contact me offline for more information.

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[Reply \(https://filmcolors.org/2018/03/15/bradford/?replytocom=1115#respond\)](https://filmcolors.org/2018/03/15/bradford/?replytocom=1115#respond)*barbaraflueckiger*September 10, 2018 at 6:36 am (<https://filmcolors.org/2018/03/15/bradford/#comment-1116>)

Thank you very much, Michael Pritchard. Noemi Daugaard is getting in touch with you.

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